Congressional Breakfast Club

Combating Nuclear Terrorism

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I have been asked to share some thoughts on nuclear terrorism and the challenges facing us in addressing this global concern. Today the world grapples with Iran and North Korea and their apparent determination to isolate themselves from the world community by seeking nuclear weapons. These are important issues, and we devote tremendous efforts towards resolving them. The Bush Administration is also focused on the very real threat of nuclear terrorism and terrorist groups.

While we do not believe that any terrorist group is currently able to launch a nuclear attack against the United States or our friends, there is ample evidence that terrorists want this capability and would have no inhibition against using it.

Our security assistance programs abroad dramatically reduce the risk of nuclear material theft. However, every security system ultimately depends on the people operating it - the so-called "human factor." Motivated by greed, coercion, or debt, facility insiders may successfully divert nuclear materials. This problem is compounded by the large number of nuclear facilities out there - each presenting a unique opportunity for material diversion.

Established crime groups are operating on the periphery of many of these facilities. These groups are often engaged in smuggling a variety of goods. If a single nuclear smuggling network materializes and operates successfully, even for a short period, a "goal quantity" of nuclear material may reach our enemies. There is only one way to combat a threat this diverse and complex - a redundant and layered defense.

I cannot emphasize enough how important this is. If human error or corruption enables smugglers to bypass one layer, our only hope is to catch them at the next. All of this points to the importance of protecting weapons-usable fissile material as the critically important step to securing the nation against nuclear terrorism.

Focusing on the protection and elimination of potentially vulnerable nuclear materials is a fundamental part of our nonproliferation strategy, that was launched after the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union. With our Russian partners, we continue to pursue this energetically.

As you may know, the Joint Statement on Nuclear Security by Presidents Bush and Putin following their meeting in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, in February 2005 has accelerated out efforts.

The Bratislava Nuclear Security Initiative called for the establishment of a bilateral Senior Interagency Working Group, co-chaired by U.S. Secretary of Energy Bodman and Russian Federal Atomic Energy Agency (Rosatom) Director Kiriyenko. Together, they oversee enhanced nuclear security cooperation in five areas: Emergency Response; Best Practices; Security Culture; Research Reactors; and Material Protection, Control and Accounting.

As a direct result of the Bratislava Initiative, our cooperation on the physical protection of sensitive nuclear sites in Russia was accelerated and will be completed by the end of 2008. It is important that the upper echelons of the Russian Government appreciate the gravity that we place on nuclear security issues and be willing to commit resources to sustaining these upgrades and promoting a strong nuclear security culture and best practices in handling nuclear materials.

Our Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI) works to convert research reactors worldwide from the use of highly-enriched uranium (HEU) to low enriched uranium (LEU). GTRI repatriates the U.S. and Russian-supplied HEU from these facilities to its country of origin, as well as addresses the "gap" material for final disposition, and performs research reactor physical security upgrades. GTRI also maintains a rapid response capability to address denuclearization.

GTRI also addresses the threat of a radiological dispersal device or "dirty bomb" by identifying and recovering excess and unwanted radiological sources domestically and securing vulnerable radiological materials abroad.

We established the Megaports program in 2003 as an extension of the Second Line of Defense program (LSD) in response to the concern that terrorists and states of concern could use the global maritime shipping network to smuggle nuclear or other radiological material or to deliver a weapon for detonation within the U.S.

To help address this threat, the Megaports Initiative installs radiation detection systems at foreign ports to enhance the detection and interdiction capabilities of our partner countries. In return, we require that data be shared on all detections and seizures of such material.

I am pleased to report that we have made steady progress over the last three years. Megaports is now operational in ports within the Netherlands, Greece, Spain, Singapore, Sri Lanka and we are conducting a pilot activity in the Bahamas. We are at various stages of design and construction in eight additional countries and are aggressively pursuing agreements with approximately 20 additional countries. The Megaports Initiative is a key component of NNSA's larger strategy to prevent the diversion of nuclear weapons and material.

As a natural complement to these activities, the SLD Program also works to enhance our foreign partners' ability to interdict illicit trafficking in nuclear and radiological material. The SLD program's deployment of radiation detection systems at high-risk land border

crossings, airports and seaports provides an additional layer of defense to nuclear site security systems, thus increasing the likelihood of detection and interdiction of nuclear materials stolen from protected facilities

Another vital relationship that we continuously work to cultivate includes our interactions with the Domestic Nuclear Defense Office (DNDO). Because the SLD program forms a critical layer in the global nuclear detection architecture, NNSA and DNDO's cooperation in the campaign to reduce the threat of nuclear terrorism is crucial.

Given our role as the primary agency responsible for international deployment of radiation detection equipment, the SLD program routinely exchanges information with DNDO to ensure that our efforts fit cohesively together in support of a comprehensive global architecture. Finally, we are working collaboratively to establish operational requirements for future detection systems and anticipate DNDO's operational testing and evaluation of improvements in nuclear detection equipment will greatly benefit our international deployment efforts.

As an additional layer of protection against an attempt to detonate a nuclear device in the U.S., NNSA is responsible for nuclear emergency response teams that can search for clandestine transport of nuclear materials or weapons, and disarm a terrorist nuclear device, if necessary. These teams work in close partnership with the FBI and the Department of Defense (DoD), which have the lead on managing our national response requiring nuclear search or render-safe activities. In the event of any sort of terrorist event involving nuclear or radioactive materials, we would support other federal agencies in managing the aftermath, saving lives, and seeking to identify those responsible.

In this area as well, we have begun to build international cooperation. Under the Bratislava process, we have initiated a nuclear emergency dialogue with Russia. Through some two years of interactions between experts, including participation in exercises held in both countries, we have greatly improved our understanding of how the Russians approach this potentially very sensitive subject, and developed contacts that could be extremely useful in a real-world nuclear emergency.

In closing, I would add one important point— that keeping our county safe from the threats of nuclear terrorism requires more than just the application technology, it requires the building of strong international bonds and relationships not just by national governments, but also by police forces, border guards, cities, communities, harbors, research institutes, and factories.

With a concerted and action-oriented approach to combat nuclear proliferation threats, one that involves the cooperation and input of nations and respect for international agreements, norms, and standards, the United States is convinced that the consensus against proliferation will, as President Bush suggested, be "translated into action."